



NATIONAL ISLAMIC FRONT OF AFGHANISTAN

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

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NATIONAL ISLAMIC FRONT OF AFGHANISTAN

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I would like to thank the members of the committee for the opportunity to brief you on the situation in Afghanistan, and I will be happy to answer whatever questions you might have after my brief introductory remarks.

I am the head of the military department of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, one of the seven Peshawar-based parties, and I have overseen the training, organization, logistics, and deployment of all NIFA forces. I sit on the military committee of the resistance alliance and the Supreme Military Council of the Afghan interim government, which directs and coordinates the overall resistance military effort. In addition, I have frequently commanded NIFA forces in the field during major operations over the last seven years, including Operation Blackout (1984), the battle for Khost (1985, 1986),

Operation Avalanche (1987), and Operation Arrow (1988), which were covered by CBS News. Most recently, I personally commanded the NIFA forces involved in the battle for the eastern city of Jalalabad. For your convenience, I have attached a complete biographical summary to this statement.

To begin, I would like to take exception with the many press reports that have argued that the resistance is incapable of achieving a military victory over the Kabul regime. This mistaken perception is the result of a serious overestimation of the weakness of the Najibullah government. Many Western intelligence analysts and reporters facilely predicted a "collapse" of the Kabul regime after the final Soviet departure. But the estimates of resistance leaders familiar with the military situation were far more cautious. My own estimate was that at least a year of conventional fighting would be required to defeat the Communist regime. While a collapse did not occur, it is a mistake to conclude that the resistance therefore cannot defeat the Kabul regime militarily.

This expectation of a Kabul regime collapse also affected the reporting of the battle for Jalalabad. Resistance forces have been criticized for poor battlefield coordination and for an inability to make the transition to conventional fighting. But in fact a seven-party council coordinated operations on each of the four fronts around Jalalabad, as well as for the battle as a whole. In reality, the main reason for the present stalemate in the battle is that we have been handicapped, on three levels, by a severe shortage in the weapons and ammunition necessary for

conventional warfare.

First, the stockpiles of munitions turned over to the resistance near the end of the Soviet phase of the war were inadequate to open multiple fronts. Normally, resistance commanders from all over Afghanistan came to Peshawar in the winter to receive arms and ammunition and returned to their bases with these supplies in the spring. Because our stockpiles were limited, this year almost all of the commanders had to return to their bases empty handed. (Where some commanders have received some supplies -- such as around Khost -- they have achieved significant gains.) Thus, instead of laying siege to several major cities simultaneously, which would have forced the enemy to disperse his forces, we did not even have sufficient arms and ammunition to besiege properly one major city.¹ As a result, the Kabul regime was able to concentrate its best ground units and the bulk of its airpower on Jalalabad. This made a decisive difference in the course of the battle. If Najibullah had not been able to reinforce the city massively with other forces from around the country and to engage in the most intensive aerial bombardment of the war, Jalalabad would have fallen by now.

Second, after launching the battle for Jalalabad on March 6, the resistance lacked a logistics system to support continuous

¹ The original battle plan for Jalalabad did not call for a frontal assault on the city. Instead, in order to avoid civilian casualties and destruction of the city, it directed resistance forces to advance to certain lines around the city in order to facilitate a proper siege. On the eastern front, this required the neutralization of the airport. Once these lines were achieved, the resistance forces were to engage in psychological operations designed to induce defections from enemy forces and a popular uprising among the civilians.

conventional engagements with the enemy at the front. For the past two years, resistance groups received packages of supplies to operate against specific targets. They were not eligible to receive additional supplies until the operation was carried out, thereby making it almost impossible for anyone to stockpile arms and ammunition. This worked in the guerrilla phase of the war but caused severe problems in the new conventional phase. When the battle was joined on the eastern front, NIFA forces quickly captured the Samarkhiel garrison, which was the 11th Division's headquarters. But the logistics system did not provide a steady flow of ammunition that would have enabled the resistance to exploit the disorganization of the enemy. While the resistance waited for additional supplies, the Kabul regime forces had time to reorganize and bring in major reinforcements from all over the country.

Third, while resistance forces on all four fronts advanced between ten and twenty kilometers, an acute shortage of materiel developed. This occurred just as our eastern front forces almost succeeded in reaching the urban districts by outflanking the airport to the south and in overrunning the 1st Corps headquarters by outflanking the airport to the north. At this point, the ammunition shortage became so acute that we were forced to terminate offensive operations in the battle for Jalalabad. In order to defend against expected counterattacks in early May, we had to divert to Jalalabad supplies issued in the fall of 1988 to commanders in other parts of Afghanistan.

Here, I would like to give you a little background informa-

tion. Our last large-scale deliveries of supplies arrived before December 1988. At that time, we were promised that as the stockpiles were drawn down we would receive additional supplies. We undertook our planning for the battle for Jalalabad with that premise in mind. As we consumed ammunition, we continued to receive promises that new shipments were coming. But none have arrived. In early May, our stockpiles dropped to dangerous levels. As a result, we were forced to cease major offensive operations. Since then, we have had no choice but to establish defensive positions and to try to hold them as best possible.

At the same time as our supplies have been dwindling, the Soviet Union has engaged in a massive effort to bolster the Kabul regime. According to U.S. officials, Moscow has delivered \$300 million of supplies per month to its client, has provided Kabul with some sophisticated weapons not available even to Warsaw Pact states, and has substantially increased the number of advisers in Afghanistan. Also, I have been told that the Kabul regime's budget for SCUD missiles exceeds the entire U.S. budget for supporting the resistance.

At this point, the supply crisis has cost the resistance the entire fighting year. It takes a great deal of time to move supplies first to staging areas near the border and then to the front-line positions in Afghanistan. Even if major ammunition shipments arrived tomorrow, it would be impossible to transport the materiel for an offensive against Kabul before winter weather would begin to make fighting difficult in October. While I believe that -- with adequate supplies -- some major victories

will be possible in the eastern and southern provinces this year, I do not believe we can launch major offensive operations against Kabul until next year.

These difficulties stem from a larger problem: the failure of those who support the resistance to make a transition from the guerrilla to the conventional phase of the war. All successful insurgencies must ultimately graduate to the level of conventional battle. But that requires preparation. Despite the urging of some resistance military leaders, a program was never established during the guerrilla phase of the war to raise and train elite resistance units capable of engaging in conventional warfare.

Those who provide support to the resistance also failed to take into account the fact that in the conventional phase of the war ammunition would be consumed at much higher rates than was done in the guerrilla phase. I would estimate that in one day of conventional fighting a resistance unit would consume approximately the same amount of ammunition as in one month of guerrilla fighting.

Moreover, supporters of the resistance continue to supply the same kinds of weapons as were delivered in the unconventional phase of the war. This has led to seven severe shortcomings:

1. Resistance forces lack effective anti-aircraft weapons. At present, Kabul regime aircraft operate above the range of the Stinger missile. As a result, the enemy has been able to engage in the heaviest aerial bombardment in the war. On July 5 alone, government fighter-bombers executed 230 sorties around Jalalabad,

and this was supplemented by continuous bombing from AN-12 transport aircraft converted into strategic bombers and by the firing of about twenty SCUD rockets.

2. Resistance forces lack adequate anti-armor weapons.

While the Milan rocket can destroy enemy armor, their numbers are so few that their impact is negligible. For example, NIFA has received only three Milan launchers for the entire country.

3. Resistance forces lack mortars and artillery with enough destructive power to take out enemy fortifications. While the 120mm Spanish mortar is effective, the supplies of these weapons and their ammunition has been inadequate. All seven parties have received a total of not more than fifty such mortars for all of Afghanistan, some of which are no longer operational.

4. Resistance forces lack adequate communications equipment to coordinate a conventional battle.

5. Resistance forces lack minefield-breaching weapons.

While the so-called Lightfoot systems are effective, the numbers, again, have been completely inadequate to the task. The seven parties have received a total of several hundred Lightfoot systems, but successful conventional operations require thousands of these systems.

6. Resistance forces lack adequate transport equipment -- such as heavy trucks and pickup trucks -- to move their forces and supplies quickly and thereby meet the requirements of conventional battle.

7. Resistance forces lack the overall logistical capacity to support large-scale concentrations of fighters with food,

clothing, medical supplies, and other necessities.

In conclusion, I would like to stress to you that a military victory for the resistance is possible and necessary. It is possible not only because the resistance has already liberated six provincial capitals and controls 85 percent of the country's district capitals but also because resistance fighters proved themselves capable of conventional warfare in Jalalabad before the supply crisis became acute. A resistance victory is also necessary. Any attempt to force the resistance into a coalition government with Communist leaders, who have killed over a million of our compatriots, would fail given the psychology of the Afghans and given the fact that the anti-communist insurgency started after the Communist coup in 1978 but before the Soviet invasion in 1979. It would also enable the Soviets to secure a dominant geostrategic position in Afghanistan -- the objective for which they invaded the country in the first place. If the Soviets succeed in keeping the Najibullah regime in power without the direct engagement of Soviet forces, their geographic proximity and their control of bases in southern Afghanistan will still enable them to reach the Persian Gulf with their tactical airpower or to launch an overland drive toward the Indian Ocean.

I believe it would be a political calamity and a human tragedy if we were to have fought so long and so hard only to be abandoned with the ultimate goal of national self-determination finally within our reach. Our friends in America have provided us with indispensable assistance in this struggle for freedom and justice, and if we take the needed steps to prevail in the post-

Soviet phase of the war, we will succeed in achieving our common objective of a free and independent Afghanistan.

Thank you for your attention, and I would be happy to answer your questions.

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